# Chekhov's gun

**Chekhov's gun** (**Chekhov's rifle**, Russian: Чеховское ружьё) is a dramatic principle that states that every element in a story must be necessary, and irrelevant elements should be removed. Elements should not appear to make "false promises" by never coming into play. The statement is recorded in letters by Anton Chekhov several times, with some variation:[1][2][3]

- "Remove everything that has no relevance to the story. If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off. If it's not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there."[3][4]
- "One must never place a loaded rifle on the stage if it isn't going to go off. It's wrong to make promises you don't mean to keep." Chekhov, letter to Aleksandr Semenovich Lazarev (pseudonym of A. S. Gruzinsky), 1 November 1889.[5][6][7] Here the "gun" is a monologue that Chekhov deemed superfluous and unrelated to the rest of the play.
- "If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired. Otherwise don't put it there." From Gurlyand's *Reminiscences of A. P. Chekhov*, in *Teatr i iskusstvo* 1904, No. 28, 11 July, p. 521.[8]

Ernest Hemingway mocked the interpretation given by English instructors to the principle. He gives in his essay "The Art of the Short Story" an example of two characters that are introduced and then never again mentioned in his short story "Fifty Grand". Hemingway valued inconsequential details, but conceded that readers will inevitably seek symbolism and significance in these inconsequential details.[9]

## See also

- Foreshadowing – a plot device where what is to come is hinted at, to arouse interest or to guard against disappointment
- MacGuffin – a plot motivator that is necessary to the plot and the motivation of the characters, but insignificant, unimportant, or irrelevant in itself
- Red herring – drawing attention to a certain element to mislead
- Shaggy dog story – a long-winded anecdote designed to lure the audience into a false sense of expectation, only to disappoint them with an anticlimactic ending or punchline

## References


1. Petr Mikhailovich Bitsilli (1983), *Chekhov's art, a stylistic analysis*, Ardis, p. x
2. Daniel S. Burt (2008), *The Literature 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Novelists, Playwrights, and Poets of All Time*, Infobase Publishing
3. Valentine T. Bill (1987), *Chekhov: The Silent Voice of Freedom*, Philosophical Library
4. С.Н. Щукин [Sergius Shchukin] (1911). "Из воспоминаний об А.П. Чехове" [Memoirs]. *Русская Мысль [Russian Thought]*: 44.
5. "Quotations by Berlin" (http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/quotations/quotations_by_ib.html). *ox.ac.uk*.
6. Чехов А. П. (1 November 1889), "Чехов — Лазареву (Грузинскому) А. С." (http://chehov.niv.ru/chehov/letters/1888-1889/letter-707.htm), *Чехов А. П. Полное собрание сочинений и писем*, АН СССР. Ин-т мировой лит.

7. Leah Goldberg (1976), *Russian Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Essays*, Magnes Press, Hebrew University, p. 163
8. In 1889, 24-year-old Ilia Gurliand noted these words down from Chekhov's conversation: "If in Act I you have a pistol hanging on the wall, then it must fire in the last act". Donald Rayfield, *Anton Chekhov: A Life*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997, ISBN 0-8050-5747-1, 203. Ernest. J. Simmons says that Chekhov repeated the point later (which may account for the variations). Ernest J. Simmons, *Chekhov: A Biography*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, ISBN 0-226-75805-2, 190.
9. Adrian c Hunter (1999), *Complete with missing parts": modernist short fiction as interrogative text* (https://web.archive.org/web/20171209144910/https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/9656160.pdf) (PDF), pp. 126–127, 201–203, archived from the original (https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/9656160.pdf) (PDF) on 2017-12-09, retrieved 2019-05-29

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